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Effective meetings

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Ministry of Finance

Notes for community leaders



Ontario Ministry
of Citizenship
and Culture



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Meeting for a purpose

Many of the meetings held by community organizations are arranged to:

- agree on a program of action
- frame a statement of policy
- conduct the group's ordinary business.

Other groups meet to provide opportunities for the members' personal development. They participate in order to:

- gain and share information
- acquire new skills
- develop informed attitudes.

Decision-making meetings are often formal. The time-honored rules of parliamentary procedure are used to insure order and discipline so participants will treat each other with justice and courtesy, and that the will of the majority is certain to prevail. If the group recognizes the underlying purposes of the rules of order, and is careful to defer decisions until the questions have been thoroughly discussed and understood by all, their meetings will be quite effective.

However, a minority opposed to a decision taken by voting on a formally presented motion or resolution may easily represent a large part of the organization's members. Many organizations feel that their program of action and public statements of policy must have the full support of the whole membership, not just the majority. The meetings of groups of this kind tend to be informal, and the result they strive for is consensus, an intelligent compromise which can be supported by most members.

Informal group discussion can easily deteriorate into nothing more than aimless conversation. Purposeful group discussion stems from first defining a problem which concerns all members of the group. When the group is experienced and well-informed, the road to a considered group opinion or plan for future action may be quite direct. The inexperienced

group may lean heavily on its leader for guidance until the members learn to discipline themselves.

This booklet addresses three major questions involved in the running of effective meetings. The amount of consideration given these concerns will often determine whether the results of meetings are positive or negative.

- What goes on when members of a group combine their efforts to solve problems, to reach decisions, or to plan for group action?
- What stages do they pass through on the way to these goals?
- What are some of the pitfalls group members can avoid?

Groups are more than the sum of their members. Something new results from people being and working together. This something is the result of the members' experience and training. Anyone who makes a serious effort to learn how to be a useful group member can improve his or her skills, and can also increase the contribution made to the community organization.

Informal group decision-making

When a group tackles a problem which concerns all or most of the members, they must follow much the same well-defined path that an individual uses to think through a problem in his or her business, social or domestic affairs.

1. They recognize that a problem exists and they try to see clearly the nature of the problem.
2. They gather as much information as possible about the facts related to the problem.
3. They think over several possible solutions and, by using the pooled experience and knowledge of every member of the group, try to see how each suggestion would work out in a particular case.
4. They decide which of the possible solutions seems to be the most satisfactory.
5. They put their decision into action and judge it by results.

A good discussion group has advantages over the individual when it comes to solving problems and making decisions. The group can look at the problem from different points of view and can draw from the collective experience and thinking of several people when considering possible solutions.

As the discussion group members gain in experience, they will learn to discipline themselves with little help from their leader, and to carry out the members' roles described in the *Leaders and Members* booklet in this series.

The group recognizes the problem

The first stage of the thinking-through process is very important when a group faces a problem. Each person may have different ideas about the problem. If the chairperson or leader is not able to help them to a common understanding of the actual problem, they will not all be talking about the same thing.

Defining the problem in clear and precise terms is the key element in decision-making. Groups should not hesitate to come back and re-define the problem at later stages in the decision-making process if information or issues arise which appear to call for a further discussion on the original problem.

The group looks for information

The group now goes after the facts. Is the problem related to similar ones that the group, or any member, has met with before? Has any research been done, or study made of this type of problem? Why is the group seeking a solution? What will be affected by the findings?

If the problem is one within the experience of the group, they may need no more than authoritative answers to a few questions. To tackle a more difficult problem intelligently may involve a wide study of several aspects of the subject. Both the group members and the chairperson should guard against accepting information that is inadequate, biased, too vague or too technical for the group to understand.

Members suggest solutions

The members of the group are now ready to suggest possible solutions, based on the information received and on their own experiences.

Each suggestion should be carefully considered. The group members weigh and discuss each suggestion, rejecting, modifying or accepting it. The role of the leader at this point is to make sure that each suggestion is clearly understood and fairly considered by the members. He or she should help the group to avoid undue pressure arising from prejudiced statements and wrong assumptions.

At the beginning of the discussion, the opinions expressed may vary widely because:

- there will be different degrees of interest in the problem
- there may be personality conflicts
- some members may have their axes to grind or may represent the strong opinions of some other group to which they belong
- if there is a question of spending funds, some may tend to be extravagant, others over-cautious
- the attitudes and thinking of the members are the result of their social, economic and religious backgrounds. This means each looks at the problem from a slightly different angle.

The discussion process aims to resolve these conflicting attitudes and make group opinion or group decision possible.

The group makes its decision

At the fourth stage of the discussion process, the group tries to narrow the suggested possibilities down to the best one.

The final decision or plan will often result from an interchange of ideas and opinions contributed from different sources. Each person in the group has had some share in the decision. Each person has modified his or her own opinions through listening to the opinions of the others in the discussion process. The result is a group decision.

There is seldom unanimous group decision on a contentious issue. However, the discussion process will produce a decision that will reflect as nearly as possible the attitudes of the whole group. All the suggestions offered will have been given a hearing and full consideration.

Trying it out in practice

The decision the group has made may lead to:

- some form of immediate action
- a new policy, or a change of policy regarding the actions and purposes of the group
- development of an attitude or change of attitude, by the group toward a certain subject or situation.

Was it a good decision? Time will tell. At some future date, the group should be prepared to make an honest assessment of the results. Too frequently, the group members arrive at a decision, put it into practice, and then fail to carry out the final step of asking themselves how good or bad a job they have done.

Discussion in the study-group

The object of the discussion process is not always the formation of a group opinion, or a decision leading to action. Quite often the process is used in fact-finding studies, to share information, to establish communication, and clear up misunderstandings. To avoid basing its findings on ignorance or prejudice, the study group should follow essentially the same process of reflective thinking it would use in planning for action.

The discussion technique is applied in this way when a group is studying a question for the sake of the personal growth, knowledge and understanding of the members. Many of our opinions and attitudes are reflections of our discussions with other people. Appreciation of art, literature, drama, music or philosophy can be developed or sharpened by a group exchange of opinion.

Leading discussion

Groups should not depend on a leader to do all the thinking, produce the answers, and make all the plans.

When people have learned to make decisions in a democratic way, the leader's job is to assist the members to reach the goals they have chosen.

A good discussion leader carries out the job by:

- encouraging a suitable climate in the group — friendly, courteous and frank. He or she should be sure that each member is acquainted with the others and that they all feel comfortable and relaxed.
- encouraging group harmony even when some of the members have sharply different opinions.
- encouraging the members to understand clearly the problem they are trying to solve, or the objective they wish to attain. The leader should be satisfied that each member is clear on the issue before the group gets deeply involved.
- helping to guide the group through the stages in problem-solving. The leader is careful that each stage is taken in its logical order. Before the group moves on to each new step, he or she encourages the members to summarize what has gone before.
- keeping the discussion alive by introducing appropriate questions when necessary.
- keeping the discussion on the track, and discouraging members who wander away from the topic.
- encouraging self-conscious members to express their opinions and join in the discussion. At the same time, the leader tries to keep the dominant talkers from taking over.
- making sure that the subject is summarized and reviewed frequently so that everyone is reminded of what has been covered so far. The leader can do this or, better still, ask various members to do it.

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- being responsible for seeing that the group can get the information it needs. The leader might arrange for them to see films, books, pamphlets or reports. He or she might give them the opportunity of listening to and questioning an expert on the subject.
 - being familiar enough with the subject being discussed so that he or she may interpret the group discussion accurately. The leader knows there is no need to be an authority.
 - co-operating closely with the secretary or recorder so that there will be an accurate record of the discussion and a solid transition to the next meeting.

Job of the recorder

When a committee or discussion group wants to keep a cumulative record of its decisions on the various aspects of a plan or a problem, the members or the chairperson will choose a recorder for the group.

The recorder's notes provide the basis for the committee's report. When a small discussion or study group must report its findings to a plenary session, an edited and perhaps shortened version of the recorder's notes will be read into the secretary's record. The recorder should also be able to give a quick review of the discussion if he or she is asked. The recorder is more at ease and prepares a more useful report, when he or she:

- is able to summarize clearly and to express ideas well in written form
- has both experience and technical knowledge of the process of group discussion
- has a good general knowledge of the subject under discussion
- can rely on the chairperson to see that the group is using good discussion techniques.

At suitable intervals, or at the conclusion of the discussion, the recorder reads the notes to the group members to be sure they represent an honest expression of the group's opinions. The final version should include any strong minority points of view that have been expressed during the discussion. The recorder is actually preparing an accurate, impartial and concise synopsis of the whole discussion. It should tell the story without including a mass of detail.

Use of an observer

It is sometimes difficult for a group to assess its own discussion process. A person who is not involved in the process can often see it more clearly than the participants. For this reason a trained observer is sometimes asked to watch the group in action. He or she does not take part in the discussion, and does not have to be necessarily an expert on the subject of the discussion.

The observer seeks to answer questions such as:

- does the group, as a whole, seem to understand clearly the objective or the problem?
- how complete is the participation?
- how do various members help or block the general discussion?

The report of the observer to the group should be presented frankly and objectively. It is unnecessary to refer to people by name or to criticize individuals. The resulting hostility might defeat the observer's purpose. The observer's responsibility is to describe the group process as he or she sees it. The group can draw the conclusions about the weakness or strength of its own procedures.

Getting the facts

When a group has recognized and defined the issue or problem it wants to discuss, it moves to the second step of the discussion process — the fact-finding stage. Intelligent discussion can only result when the members of the group have complete and unbiased information.

Here are some of the most used methods of presenting resource material to a group.

Lecture

The most common technique for presenting information to a group is based on one person making a thorough study of a topic, then presenting the result orally. This method has been overworked, but there are many cases where it could not be replaced, with advantage, by any other technique. If the speaker is a skilled lecturer, the method can combine high entertainment value with a striking presentation of the subject. The skilful use of slides and other audio-visual teaching aids can add effectiveness.

A lecture can cover more material more quickly than any other method, but it has disadvantages. For one thing, expert lecturers are rare. Because they are not participating, members may grow bored and inattentive. A lecture draws from the experience of one person and may not succeed in touching all sides of the question. The thinking of the group may be constrained along the path the lecturer leads them.

The chief disadvantages of the lecture method may be overcome by the generous allotment of time for questions.

Panel discussion

To insure an unbiased presentation of all sides of a question, a panel of experts, especially selected to represent various shades of opinion, is often asked to discuss a subject before the group. The moderator or chairperson guides the discussion along the lines that will be of most use to the members of the listening

group. The moderator's opening talk presents the topic for discussion.

Members of the panel are usually people who have made a special study of the topic. They do not present their points of view in the form of speeches. The discussion should follow naturally and not become a symposium of prepared addresses. A cut-and-dried panel is so obviously artificial that much of the interest is lost.

The discussion is carried on for a set period of time and then the meeting is given over to questions and follow-up discussion by the whole group. Each question from the listeners should be answered briefly and clearly by the panel members within whose field that particular question falls.

Symposium

Speakers at a symposium do not necessarily hold controversial views, as do the members of a discussion panel. They have usually been chosen because they have a special knowledge of some phase of the subject to be discussed. Each speaker makes a careful study of his or her contribution and they all combine to give the listeners a clear understanding of the subject from various angles so that open discussion can follow.

Questions from the group should be permitted after each talk so that doubtful points may be cleared up immediately.

Seminar

The seminar method enables a small group to study problems that require research. Usually each member of a seminar is expected to present some prepared material covering a phase of the question that he or she has studied closely. During the discussion, criticism and comment that follow each of these presentations, the participants exchange information and pool their ideas. They may carry their task further than fact-finding. They may go on to preparing proposed solutions to problems, to planning of all kinds, or to surveys and evaluations.

Participants in a seminar may have the services of a resource person, an expert or a specialist from outside the group.

Exhibit or demonstration

Exhibits or demonstrations are most effective when a resource person is present to answer the group members' questions.

An exhibit or demonstration can seldom fill in a general background of information for a group, but can add dramatic force to a particular phase when used in combination with other methods.

Films and other audio-visual aids

Films, filmstrips, tapes, slides and charts are of great assistance in presenting certain kinds of information to the members of a group. To be effective they must be carefully chosen and used with skill.

Discussion process in large groups

Informal discussion methods are now often used even for meetings of large groups. Various devices are used to form face-to-face groups within the main assembly, and then to correlate the findings of all the small groups.

In these small sub-groups it is possible for each person to play a significant part and to have the opportunity to express opinions. The ideal face-to-face group is large enough to provide a variety of experience and opinions, but small enough to allow each individual to take part in the discussion. Between five and eight members is ideal.

Buzz-groups

The buzz-group technique can be used to obtain program suggestions from the members at a general meeting.

These discussion units are formed by having groups of five or six members turn so that they face each other for 10 minutes of informal discussion without actually moving away from their positions in the assembly hall. This way of forming face-to-face groups quickly involves all the people present, and allows each small group to report, through its chosen spokesperson, its opinion on a single point.

The buzz session method, like any other, can be wasteful and disrupting if it gets out of hand, or if it has no real purpose. These small group discussions must be limited to a short, stated period of time and then brought back into the general meeting. The chairperson must be sure that the purpose of the whole group is going to be well served by taking the time to get group opinion by this method.

Discussion groups

For full-scale discussion, the small unit groups need more time and some arrangement of facilities so each group can work undisturbed. When this method is used, the large meeting usually assembles for such purposes as outlining the

proposition and receiving resource information. Then the small groups assemble in separate places and start the jobs they have been assigned. They may each discuss some phase of the problem, or each may tackle it as a whole.

Within the small sub-group, each person can express views on the problem being discussed. The result of the discussion in each sub-group is then presented to the general meeting for final discussion and decision-making.

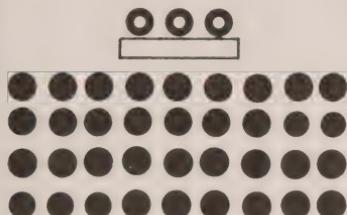
Conference

Sometimes a group finds that its interests overlap those of other organizations, and it is clear that only co-operative study will yield satisfactory solutions to their common problems. Associated organizations may see that they will all profit from an exchange of ideas between representatives. A single large organization may find that it faces varied questions that must be studied separately and then co-ordinated into a practical policy. Situations like these are usually dealt with at a conference. Members or delegates gather for a day, a weekend or a full week of discussion.

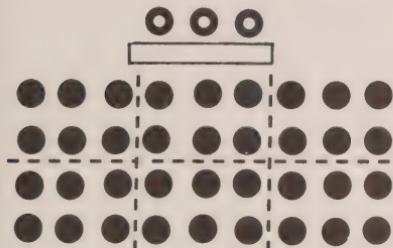
Some of the plenary sessions of the conference may be quite formal. At other times the members will form small units for informal discussion. At many conferences, different questions, or several aspects of a problem, are discussed by different groups of delegates at the same time. When an organization or a community sends more than one representative to a conference, it is wise to plan the schedule of each person so that as many sessions as possible are covered by the joint effort.

The recording of conference discussions, resolutions, final decisions, and the important minority views is a big part of the job. Observers are often asked to attend conference sessions to assist work groups or the whole conference group to evaluate their own progress.

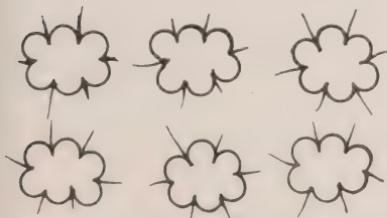
A conference makes use of many different applications of the decision-making process, and varied methods of presenting resource material.



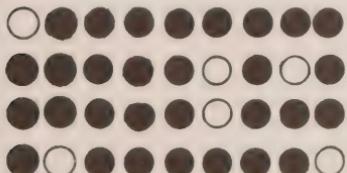
A conference often opens with a formal plenary session, the participants sitting in rows, the leaders at the front.

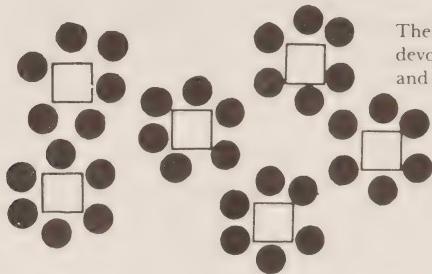


Buzz-groups can be formed to involve members and to get group-opinion on a single point. The leaders are only concerned to help the groups to form.

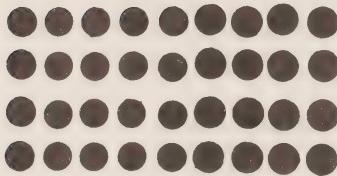


Buzz-group spokespersons report to the reformed plenary.





The final plenary of a conference is often devoted to evaluation by the delegates and the summaries of the observers.



Study groups will assemble to carry out tasks assigned by decision of the delegates in plenary session.

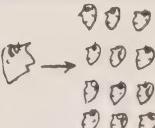
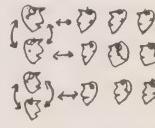
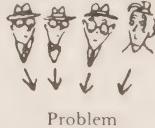
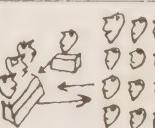
Brainstorming

When a group can only make progress by producing a large stock of new ideas, the technique of brainstorming may help them over the impasse. Only narrow and quite specific questions will work well in brainstorming. A planning group could more effectively use the technique on a problem like, "How might each of our members contribute to an international night?" than on the broader problem, "How can we improve member-participation in our organization's programs?"

The essence of brainstorming is free and unrestricted generation of ideas — good, bad, indifferent. No qualitative judgments whatever should be introduced during the session. No one should be allowed to criticize or evaluate any of the suggestions. All should be impartially written down for later processing. The best ideas often result when the participants build upon and modify each other's suggestions.

The recorded list of suggestions is processed by the chairperson, or by a group who took no part in the brainstorming session. Similar ideas are grouped and the more impossible suggestions eliminated. The result should be a stock of useful ideas and perhaps one or two brilliant enough to spark the group to new efforts.

Discussion program methods

METHOD	CHIEF CHARACTERISTIC	PATTERN OF PARTICIPATION	SPECIAL USEFULNESS	LIMITATIONS
Lecture, film, reading, recitals, etc. 	Information-giving.		Systematic presentation of knowledge.	Little opportunity for audience to participate.
Forum 	Information-giving followed by questions for clarification.		Audience can obtain the specific information it wants on particular aspects of the subject.	Formality; lack of freedom to interchange ideas.
Symposium panel or debate 	Presentation of different points of view.		Different points of view spotlight issues, approaches, angles; stimulate analysis.	Can get off the beam; personality of speakers may overshadow content; vocal speaker or questioner can monopolize program
Discussion 	High degree of group participation.		Pooling of ideas, experience, and knowledge; arriving at group decisions.	Practical with only a limited number of people.
Project, field trip, exhibits, etc. 	Investigation of a problem co-operatively.		Gives first-hand experience.	Requires extra time and energy for planning.
Buzz groups 	100% participation by large audiences through small clusters of participants.		Makes individual discussion, pooling of ideas, possible in large groups. Develops leadership skill in members.	Contributions are not likely to be very deep or well organized.
Group interview 	Spontaneous giving of opinions and facts by experts in response to questions.		Brings knowledge from a number of sources to bear on one problem.	Becomes disorganized without careful planning of material to be covered.

Formal meetings

Many voluntary organizations try to keep their meetings as informal as the situation permits. But there is still a place for formal procedures. When a group must formulate policy in spite of controversy and dissension, or when the formal and legal record of a decision is important, or when a mass of routine business must be disposed of in the shortest possible time — these are the times for formal parliamentary procedures.

The principles or rules called *parliamentary procedure* have come down to us from the Roman Senate and from British and American parliamentary custom. They have been developed over the centuries as a tool for maintaining order and control in democratic assemblies.

Four cardinal principles lie behind the rules of parliamentary procedure:

- justice and courtesy for all
- recognition of the will of the majority
- protection of the rights of the minority
- one thing at a time.

At least three sources of reference are used in Canada. Bourinot's Rules of Order are used by the federal government and therefore are most widely accepted. The other two books on the subject which are acceptable, although they are American, are Robert's and Reed's.

After years of experience, some organizations prefer to change some of these rules to suit their particular needs. Such changes are usually recorded in the organization's constitution and bylaws.

When an association uses formal procedures in its general meetings, the officers have the responsibility of learning the accepted forms and how to apply them without hesitation or confusion. It often happens that a member of a group, who takes a special interest in democratic traditions, will develop

into an expert "parliamentarian" and assume the role of advisor to the officers and members.

Order of business

The list of the items to be brought before a meeting, the whole program, is called the *agenda*. The sequence in which the items are arranged is called the *order of business*. In a formal meeting, the order of business will cover the whole agenda. In the meetings of most community organizations, the order of business will apply only to the business part of the agenda. The order of business most often used is as follows.

1. *Call to order* "The meeting will now come to order" says the chairperson or president.
2. *Roll call* This is important for deciding quorum and eligibility to vote, and in identifying visitors.
3. *Reading of the minutes* Minutes of the previous meeting are read by the secretary or "taken as read" if copies are sent to the members by mail.
4. *Confirming the minutes* "Are there any errors or omissions?" Corrections are made without a motion. "If there are no (further) errors or omissions, I declare the minutes approved as read (corrected)." Some organizations prefer to have a formal motion for the adoption of minutes, particularly if they have been corrected.
5. *Reports of executive officers* The treasurer and chairpersons of standing and special committees read written reports which are filed with the secretary as soon as read. The report of the treasurer is not adopted by motion unless it has been audited. A committee report is not adopted unless it contains a recommendation and then the recommendation only is considered by the motion. It is customary for the person reading the report to move the adoption if it qualifies.

6. *Correspondence* "Is there any correspondence?" The secretary will read any correspondence. Letters requiring action are handed to the president; any others are filed without motion.

7. *Unfinished business, or business arising out of the minutes* "Is there any unfinished business?" The secretary should have a list ready.

8. *New business* Correspondence is usually considered first, since it is at hand. It may be presented in any order at the president's option.

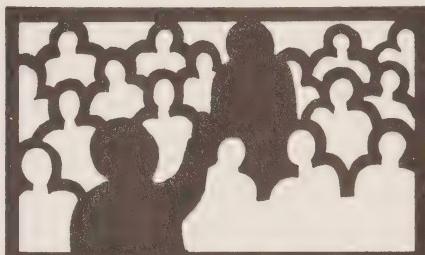
9. *Announcements* "Are there any announcements?", for example the time and place of the next meeting or of a special event.

10. *Adjournment* "If there is no further business (pause) I declare the meeting adjourned" or "... this meeting will stand adjourned." If for any reason a meeting is adjourned before the order of business is completed it must be adjourned by motion.

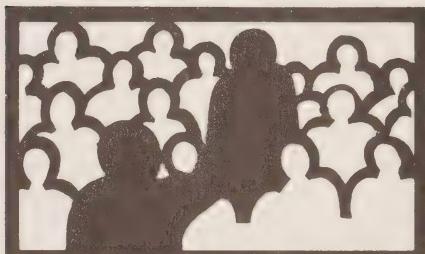
Handling of motions

A motion is the principal tool of an organization for recording the opinion of the group, deciding to take action, and recognizing accomplishment. Motions should be carefully worded to be identifiable as belonging to one of the above categories. It is advisable to hand them to the secretary in writing.

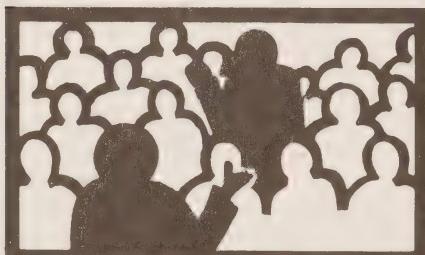
Motions may result from discussions at a meeting, or they may be presented to initiate discussion. The usual procedure for processing motions is as follows.



1. A member stands and says, "Mr. Chairman, or Madam Chairwoman."



2. The chairperson recognizes the speaker and says, "Mr. Smith", or "The chair recognizes Mr. Smith."

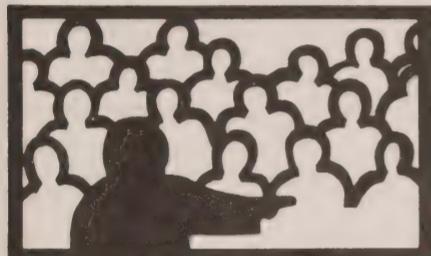


3. Mr. Smith says, "I move that . . ." and delivers or reads the motion.



4. Another member, Brown, raises one hand to be identified by chairperson and secretary; then says "I second the motion."

The seconding of the motion ensures that the idea expressed in the motion has the support of more than a single member.



5. The chairperson says, "It has been moved by Mr. Smith and seconded by Mr. Brown that . . . Is there any discussion?"



6. The mover (Mr. Smith) usually speaks first giving reasons. Then, an opportunity to speak must be given to anyone wishing to oppose or support the motion.



7. At the end of discussion, the chairperson says, "If there is no further discussion (pause) the motion is that . . . All in favor?" He or she pauses while a count is taken. "Opposed?" Again he or she pauses for the count, then says, "The motion is carried (defeated or lost)."

Changing of motions

To change a motion requires a new motion called an *amendment*. Care must be taken to see that an amendment merely changes a part or parts of the original motion. An amendment which completely alters or nullifies the original motion should not be accepted by the chairperson since a vote against the motion serves the same purpose.

An amendment proposes:

- to insert or add a word, phrase or sentence to the motion
- to strike out or delete a word, phrase or sentence of the motion
- to strike out and insert another (substitute) word, phrase, or sentence.

The mover of the amendment says "I move to amend the motion by . . ." The seconder says "I second the amendment (or motion to amend)". Discussion, if any, then follows as in the handling of the original motion.

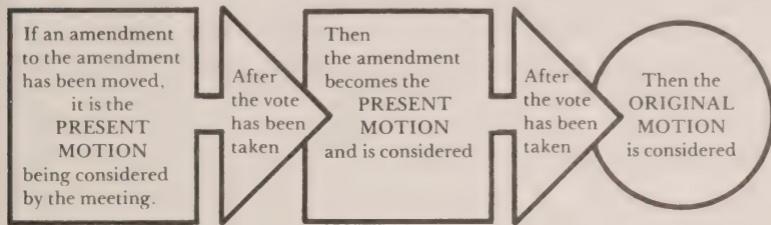
A vote on the amendment must be taken before the original motion is voted on. Should the majority be in favor of the amendment (carried), the chairperson then says "Is there any further discussion on the motion?" After a pause he or she says, "If not, the motion, as amended is that . . ."

If the majority vote against the amendment (defeated) then the original motion, unchanged, is voted on in the regular way.

A second amendment is called the *amendment of the amendment*. This is the limit to which alterations of motions should go in any meeting. It should be clearly understood that an amendment to the amendment is exactly that. It alters only the amendment, not any other part of the original motion.

The procedure for handling the amendment to the amendment is the same as for any motion. The second amendment must be considered before the first amendment. Then another amendment to the amendment may be moved.

Should anyone wish to alter a different part of the original motion, he or she must wait until the foregoing series of amendments has been dealt with, and may then move a new amendment.



Special motions

The general rule is that any motion must be dealt with before another one is considered. However, there are situations where motions of a special nature must be considered before anything else.

These are *privileged, subsidiary, incidental or unclassified motions.*

Motions which fall into any of these categories may be misused. They should be accepted by the chairperson with the utmost caution. Those cardinal principles of parliamentary procedure mentioned on page 19 should be kept in mind. The chairperson must see that no one is allowed to use these motions to confuse the meeting.

Privileged motions

Privileged motions are the kind that can stop proceedings no matter what is going on. A speaker may be interrupted by a privileged motion. The chair must deal with it immediately, before the speaker continues. A privileged motion does not refer to the subject under discussion, but to the physical comfort of the members attending, to the fact that the order of business is not being followed, or to the adjournment of the meeting.

1. "Mr. Chairman, I rise to a question of privilege. Will you please have the windows opened?" This is used for the consideration of an urgent matter, usually concerned with physical well-being of those attending the meeting – noise, interruptions, heat or cold. Such a motion does not require a seconder and it is customary for the chairperson simply to ask for an expression of opinion from the meeting without allowing any discussion. A majority of hands raised would indicate that the windows ought to be opened and the meeting would return to the order of business.

2. "Madam Chairwoman, I rise to a point of order. The orders call for discussion of . . ." This is sometimes termed "call for orders-of-the-day". Its purpose is to bring the meeting back to the question being considered. A good chairperson should not allow the meeting to digress so that such a motion is needed. As in a question of privilege, no seconder is required for this sort of motion. The chairperson simply acknowledges the motion and returns to the order of business.

3. Anyone may make a motion to adjourn at any time during a meeting. But it is considered discourteous to do so while discussion is in progress. A motion to adjourn during a meeting must have a seconder. There can be no discussion. A vote is taken immediately. A majority in favor means that the meeting is adjourned. The question being considered at the time of such an adjournment is placed on the agenda for the following meeting as "unfinished business".

4. Sometimes in large gatherings or lengthy sessions, a motion to "call a recess" is presented. This requires a seconder. It can only be discussed as to the length of the recess.

Subsidiary motions

Subsidiary motions refer to the subject under discussion. An amendment is actually a subsidiary motion. It is not good practice to allow a speaker to be interrupted by a "subsidiary motion". The chairperson may say, "We will consider your motion as soon as this speaker has concluded his remarks."

1. "Mr. Chairman, I move we call for a vote." Such a call for a vote is sometimes used to end a lengthy discussion. It must be seconded. No discussion is allowed, but a two-thirds majority must vote in favor of it. If it carries, then the original motion must be voted upon immediately.

2. "Mr. Chairman, I move that this question be referred to a special committee consisting of . . . (or as named by the chairperson)". When further information on any subject is necessary before a decision can be reached, the question may

be referred to a special committee who will report to a subsequent meeting. At that meeting the matter is brought up under "unfinished business". Such a motion must be seconded and may be discussed. A simple majority is sufficient to carry it.

3. "Madam Chairwoman, I move that we table the motion (or . . . that the motion be placed on the table)." Tabling a motion is used as a method of postponing or laying aside discussion of a question until later in the meeting. It requires a seconder; there can be no discussion; and a simple majority approves it.

There are other motions used in parliamentary situations to postpone discussion, but they are seldom used by community organizations since referring to a committee serves this purpose.

Incidental motions

Incidental motions indicate that something else must be done before the question being discussed can be properly dealt with. They do not refer specifically to the question being discussed. In fact, they are often used to attempt to nullify the original motion.

1. "Mr. Chairman, I move that the motion be withdrawn." A withdrawn motion may be useful if discussion discloses that any motion is a waste of time or not in the best interests of the organization. The mover of the original motion, or anyone else, may move that the motion be withdrawn. This does not require a seconder. There can be no discussion. A simple majority indicates the withdrawal. Some organizations do not vote on the question at all, but simply ask the mover and the seconder of the original motion for approval to withdraw it. The secretary should strike out of the minutes all reference to the motion that has been withdrawn.

2. "Mr. Chairman, I move that nominations be closed." The aim of a motion to close nominations is to keep the number of names on a ballot within reasonable limits. This special motion is too often used undemocratically to narrow the ballot to one or two candidates — a dangerous practice. To prevent this misuse of the motion, the chairperson may recognize members rising to make further nominations before recognizing the mover of the motion to close nominations. As a further safeguard, a seconder and a two-thirds majority are required to carry the motion. A motion to re-open nominations may be moved by anyone who wishes to nominate another candidate.

3. "Mr. Chairman, I move to appeal the ruling of the chair. It should be that . . ." The motion to appeal the ruling of the chair must be made immediately upon disagreeing with the action of the chairperson. It is a means of protection for the members of the group against an autocratic or misinformed chairperson. It is sometimes used by "hecklers" in an attempt to undermine the prestige of the chairperson. This type of motion should not be considered a vote of no confidence unless the motion so states. The proper interpretation is that the chair has misunderstood the will of the majority. This motion must be seconded and discussion must be allowed. A majority in favor of the motion obliges the chairperson to change his or her action in accordance with the wishes of the group.

It is customary, though not essential, for the chairperson to ask the secretary or some disinterested person to call for the vote on a motion to appeal the ruling of the chair and to indicate the result. The chairperson should then graciously accept the decision and, without apology, say something like this: "Since it is the wish of the majority of the members present, I shall change my ruling as follows . . ."

Unclassified motions

Unclassified motions refer to motions that have previously appeared on the order of business but need to be considered again.

1. "Mr. Chairman, I move that we reconsider the motion previously decided upon that . . ." When the group desires to reconsider the motion so that the members may vote with more knowledge of the subject, this type of motion is used. It requires a seconder and may be discussed. A majority in favor carries the motion.
2. "Madam Chairwoman, I move that we rescind the motion previously passed that . . ." Where a group has recorded a decision, and then finds it impracticable or impossible to abide by, this motion to rescind (cancel or repeal) the motion is used. It requires a seconder and may be discussed. It is customary to require a two-thirds majority.
3. "Mr. Chairman, I move that we take from the table the motion that . . ." Where a motion has been tabled (see Subsidiary Motions) it is necessary to move to take the motion from the table and have it placed on the agenda again for consideration.

Voting or balloting

To determine the opinion of a group on a motion, it is necessary to have each member indicate whether he or she is in favor of or against the question. There are a number of accepted methods of acquiring this information such as *closed ballot*, *polled ballot*, *standing vote*, *show of hands* or *unanimous vote*.

A *closed ballot* is the method used when individual opinions should remain secret. It is always used for the election of officers and frequently for the admission of new members and highly controversial questions. It may be requested by any member through a motion properly passed "that the vote on this question be by secret ballot". A blank slip of paper, or one carrying the exact question to be voted on, is handed to each member in good standing. The group is then instructed to mark the ballots in the proper way (e.g. an X opposite a name, "yes" or "no", or a person's name). The ballots are then folded once or twice and handed to the scrutineer at the proper time. The actual number of votes for and against the question is announced by the presiding officer and recorded in the minutes except in the case of the election of officers.

A *polled ballot* is considered wise on many controversial issues. The secretary reads aloud the name of each eligible member who replies aloud in accordance with his or her opinion. The presiding officer should instruct the members to reply using such words as "yes", or "no", "for", or "against". (The words "yea" and "nay" are confusing because of the similarity of their sounds.) After the secretary has read the entire list, the presiding officer should enquire whether there are any others present who consider themselves eligible to vote. Each request to vote should be considered on its merits and a definite ruling given. Following this, the secretary should tabulate the number of votes for and against and hand the result to the chairperson for announcement. The information should appear in the minutes.

A *standing vote* is used in a large group, or where there is any doubt as to the number of votes. The presiding officer may say, "All those in favor please stand (or will signify by standing)". The chairperson may then ask the secretary to count the number of persons standing and ask someone else to check the result. It is essential that the chairperson immediately say, "All those opposed please stand", and that the second count be taken. The result of this vote must also be recorded in the minutes.

A *show of hands* is the most frequently used method of voting in community organizations. The chairperson usually says, "All those in favor please raise their hands". If there is any obvious majority for or against the question the chairperson usually announces that "the motion is carried (or is defeated)". An actual count is not taken. Should there be doubt as to the majority, it is wise for the chairperson to ask the members to vote again, this time taking a standing vote.

The *unanimous vote* is used occasionally when an organization wishes to record unanimous approval of some item such as a vote of appreciation, or the election of an honorary officer. When such a result is obvious, the chairperson says, "The secretary will please cast a unanimous ballot in favor of the motion".

The president at a formal meeting

The president usually acts as chairperson at large formal meetings of any organization. It is his or her responsibility to see that order and decorum are preserved, and that both sides of any question are thoroughly and fairly discussed.

Using tact and courtesy, the president should:

- call the meeting to order
- adhere strictly to the order of business
- guide each debate so that it does not deviate from the question or from the order of business
- personally avoid discussing the question.

Every member who desires to speak should have the opportunity. If possible, pro and con speakers should alternate in the debate. If the president must discuss the question, he or she should ask someone else to take the chair until after the vote has been taken.

The president should remember:

- that no seconder means there is no motion
- that the wording of each motion should be stated clearly twice, once before discussion and before voting
- to call for the vote and announce the result.

The president votes only to break a tie. Since it is customary to consider a tie vote as defeating a motion, the president's deciding vote is usually cast against the motion. The reason for this is that half the group is against the proposal. If the tie is the result of a secret ballot, then the president does not vote to break the tie, but declares the motion defeated.

The president also should:

- be ready to appoint committees when authorized by a motion
- suggest motions but not make them
- refer to himself or herself as "the chair", never as "I"
- use the gavel sparingly. One rap for calling the meeting to order, one for restoring order, or for adjournment
- remain seated, usually, except for calling the meeting to order, putting a question to the vote, giving a decision.

The president's knowledge of parliamentary procedure should be sure and precise, so that he or she is able to give full attention to what the members are saying. If the president hesitates and consults over each decision, he or she will be too preoccupied to sense the attitudes developing and changing among the members.

One of the president's most important duties is to see that the vice-president conducts meetings at least twice during the term of office.

Other titles in this series are:

- Administration
- The community
- Community conferences and seminars
- Community organizations
- Evaluation
- Leaders and members
- Program planning
- Publicity and public relations
- Speaking in public
- Teaching adults

Further reading

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